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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE 3604
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 1753
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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PROMOTES SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT ON
NORTHERN BORDER

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador visited the remote Carchi province on May 18 to highlight USG investment in security and development on Ecuador's northern border with Colombia. While there, the Ambassador met with military and police officials, toured a customs and immigration post, hosted a luncheon with USG and GOE stakeholders in regional development, inaugurated a USAID-supported clean water project, and met with the local press. The visit was well received, advancing USG efforts to increase awareness of USG social and security investments in the region. End Summary.

Ambassador Discusses Security with the 39th Army Battalion

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador began with a visit to the 39th Army Battalion headquarters in Tulcan, Carchi province. The 39th Battalion Commander, Colonel Galo Cruz, told the Ambassador that there are more than 24 known illegal crossing points in his sector, giving Colombian illegal armed groups easy access to Ecuadorian territory. He explained the logistical and resource challenges his unit faces in securing the porous border, and lamented the lack of a greater Colombian military presence along the shared border. Cruz reiterated the GOE position that Ecuador will not get involved in Colombia's internal conflict, but said that the GOE is committed to controlling and protecting Ecuadorian territory. The Ambassador commended COL Cruz for GOE efforts, and expressed USG commitment to help Ecuador address these regional security threats.

¶3. (SBU) The 39th Army Battalion is the main unit in the 13th Brigade and is responsible for the largest sector within the Carchi province, which includes 90 miles of the 400-mile border with Colombia. The 39th is operating at 90% its personnel capacity, making it one of the strongest Ecuadorian Army units. Illicit cross-border activity is fluid, with drugs and other contraband exiting Colombia through numerous illegal crossing points, trails, and dirt roads. FARC and ELN rebels are able to enter/exit the two countries with relative ease when not in uniform. The Colombian military has a permanent presence at the Rumichaca border crossing point, with a second small detachment opposite Tufino, Ecuador. Communication between Ecuadorian and Colombian forces in the sector is good, with regular intelligence sharing for force protection needs.

Ambassador Visits Checkpoint

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador met with Anti-Narcotics Police Commander for Carchi Lt. Colonel Claudio Guerra at the region's only legal crossing point, the Rumichaca Bridge Customs and Immigration Complex. Guerra said that the Rumichaca facility is inundated with traffic, but unfortunately lacks the space necessary to more thoroughly search vehicles. Guerra,s team showed off USG-provided gear such as fiber optic tools and ion scanners, used to detect drugs in vehicles. He thanked the Ambassador for the \$1.7 million NAS will spend to construct a new police checkpoint in Tulcan, saying that it would help alleviate the burden placed on the Rumichaca facility. The Ambassador commended police efforts and expressed the continuing U.S. commitment to helping the anti-narcotics unit improve facilities and drug detection capabilities.

¶5. (SBU) Anti-narcotics police efforts in Carchi are complicated by the extensive network of secondary roads that parallel and extend across the Colombian border throughout the province. NAS-funded vehicles and fuel to both the police and military in this region have allowed the police to expand patrolling and assert more control over Ecuadorian territory. The new police base will also improve GOE ability to monitor the growing truck traffic on the Pan American Highway between Colombia and Ecuador, and better monitor the large warehouse in Tulcan where vehicles and merchandise are stored until cleared by customs.

Ambassador Pushes Development Agenda

¶6. (SBU) The Ambassador, USAID Director, Northern Border Development Unit Director Maxamiliano Donoso, and several local officials inaugurated a USAID funded clean water project in the town of Cristobal Colon, Carchi. Over 200

residents attended the ceremony, profusely thanking the Ambassador for the USG investment in their community's public health. The Ambassador noted the importance of such projects to improve public health, and voiced firm USG commitment to assist with development efforts in the northern border region.

¶7. (SBU) The Ambassador also hosted a luncheon to highlight USG and GOE development and security efforts in the region. The meeting was attended by Acting Carchi Prefect Manuel Revelo, Carchi Governor Bolivar Chamarro, Acting Tulcan Mayor Llia Castilo, Espejo Mayor Lenin Carrera, Montufar Mayor Homero Cadena, and Mira Mayor Fausto Ruiz. Colonel Galo Cruz and Lt. Colonel Claudio Guerra also attended. The Ambassador told the group that the U.S. had invested over \$6 million in Carchi since 2001 to fund potable water, sanitation, infrastructure, and civil society development programs. She noted that these efforts aim to improve the quality of life of northern border residents, and reflect USG commitment to continue to work with Ecuador to provide a better future in a region beset by illicit trade. Local and regional officials thanked the Ambassador for USG support, with several saying that additional funds for development and security projects were desperately needed.

Press Coverage

¶8. (U) The Ambassador's visit received extensive national and local media coverage, underscoring her message of U.S. support for both northern border development and security, and countering the impression that the GOE's decision to confiscate Occidental Petroleum could undermine broader bilateral relations. Coverage included a lengthy piece on a nationally viewed evening news broadcast and articles in both Quito and Guayaquil,s major dailies, as well as more populist nationally circulating dailies. Coverage highlighted plans for the construction of a NAS-financed counter drug control post, as well as the Ambassador's statement of commitment to continue US support for Ecuadorian efforts to protect its borders and sovereignty.

Comment

19. (SBU) The Ambassador's visit to Carchi provided an excellent opportunity for her to highlight U.S. support to the region, while pushing for greater security and development investment. Ecuadorian military and police officials in Carchi are well aware of the security threat posed by FARC, ELN and other illegal armed groups operating at their border. They are using limited resources, equipment, and personnel to safeguard Ecuadorian territory and provide licit economic opportunities for their residents, and deserve our continued support. Local police, military, and government officials are making considerable ground on both the security and development fronts, despite nationalistic politics.

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